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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
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"Saying it like it is!"

Another roller coaster ride on Wall Street this past week, and it was all pretty much downhill. It's not fun seeing your retirement funds and other investments quickly go down the proverbial drain! And while all of this is going on, our illustrious president is starting his vacation down on Martha's Vineyard! It must be nice to be able to "forget your troubles" and take a great vacation on the Vineyard! Don't you wish that you had that luxury these days? And those hapless apologists on the islands saying that poor Obama has been working hard and deserves a vacation! Oh, I forgot, the rest of us don't work hard and don't deserve a vacation! I don't know about you, but I couldn't afford a vacation even if I had the time to take one! The 60's rock group, The Byrds, had it right when they put out the song: "When I Grow Up, I Wanna Be A Politician"!!

On another note, I finally had a second cortisone shot (a spinal injection) this past week, and had some better results than my first one. I finally had my first night of non-pain-interrupted sleep in over a year! While I have had a few pangs of pain when I've stretched my leg inadvertently, the episodes of discomfort and pain have decreased. Hopefully this will continue to improve over the next couple of weeks, the usual period for the treatment to take full effect. We'll see how it goes.

Anyway, I'm going to enjoy the euphoric feeling for the moment, so I'm not going to get stressed out talking about some of the things I mentioned in last week's editorial, or new topics from the past week. Doing so just causes more heartburn and palpitations!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section
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- Sony Cuts Price of PlayStation 3!
Witcher 2 Getting A Big 2.0 Update!
Atari And Hasbro Settle D&D Dispute!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Sony Cuts Price of PlayStation 3

Sony says it is cutting the price of its PlayStation 3 gaming console by \$50 in an attempt to drum up demand for the 5-year-old video game console.

It's now \$249, down 17 percent.

The last time Sony Corp. lowered the price of the PlayStation 3 was in 2009.

The price cut announced Tuesday comes less than a month after rival Nintendo Co. cut the price of its handheld Nintendo 3DS player. The 3DS launched with much fanfare but lost sales momentum. That device lets players view 3-D games and videos without special glasses. But the value of 3-D is not apparent to everyone. The iPhone and other smartphones are also competing with handheld gaming devices.

Sony is launching its handheld PlayStation Vita in the U.S. early next year.

The Witcher 2 Getting A Big 2.0 Update

CD Projekt announced at GamesCom that a big update is in the works for The Witcher 2, which was released for PC earlier this year and is coming to Xbox 360 early next year. The content-oriented add-on will be ready on September 29, and all of the material will then be integrated into the eventual console release.

While there will be some under the hood improvements and gameplay tweaks, the core of the update is additional game content. Dark Mode will be added, a new difficulty level. It's easier than the Insane difficulty, which literally deactivates your saves and ends your game the first time you die. It's a bigger challenge though, balanced by the presence of powerful 'Dark' items that players can use.

A much-needed tutorial will also be added. The Witcher 2 was praised pretty widely for its strong gameplay and story, but many criticisms were leveled at the steep learning curve. Having some pointers guiding you through the opening sections ought to help a great deal. Rounding out the new content is Arena Mode, a wave-based survival challenge in which players can pick up XP and items for their character.

You can hear the details straight from the CD Projekt team in a newly released dev diary.

Atari And Hasbro Settle Ongoing D&D Dispute

Back in 2009, Hasbro filed a lawsuit against Atari claiming that the video game publisher had breached its licensing agreement for the Dungeons & Dragons brand. The lawsuit threatened upcoming Atari projects, but today the companies announced that an agreement has been reached.

Wizards of the Coast, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Hasbro, has sent out a press release stating that digital licensing rights for the Dungeons & Dragons brand have been returned to Hasbro. Atari will continue making and selling games under this license, including the disappointing downloadable title Dungeons & Dragons: Daggerdale, the upcoming Facebook game Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes of Neverwinter, and the online PC game simply named Neverwinter, which has been delayed until late 2012. Neither Hasbro nor Atari are discussing additional settlement details at this time.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Group Seeks Amazon Boycott Over Sales Tax Fight

A coalition of nonprofit groups is calling on customers of Amazon.com Inc. to cancel their accounts unless the Internet retailer stops resisting a California law that requires more online retailers to charge a state sales tax.

The nonprofits along with several state lawmakers Monday called on Amazon to "stop cheating California" by trying to repeal the law through a ballot referendum.

Amazon's opponents held a news conference outside the Capitol announcing a new website - ThinkBeforeYouClickCA.org - that is intended to organize opposition to Amazon and explain how customers can close their accounts.

Amazon.com Inc. did not immediately respond to an email and a call for comment Monday.

Lawmakers in June approved a measure to expand collection of California sales tax to more Internet retailers, estimating it would bring in at least \$200 million a year.

Amazon has spent \$3 million on the referendum to repeal that law so far.

The coalition combines groups supporting increased funding for health and social services, which have been cut deeply by the state in the last several budgets. They contend that by avoiding collection of the state sales and use tax, Amazon gains a competitive advantage over businesses based in California and deprives the state of revenue that could go to help seniors, working families and the disabled.

The tax revenue that Amazon could collect could restore home assistance for disabled Californians that help them go to work rather than languish in expensive nursing homes, said Jessica Lehman, representing Community Resources for Independent Living.

"If Amazon.com won't contribute to California, then we won't contribute to Amazon," she said.

Other groups calling for the boycott included the California Alliance for Retired Americans, the Health and Human Services Network of California and Parent Voices.

Representatives of the groups were joined by three Democratic lawmakers - Sen. Loni Hancock and Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner of Berkeley, and Assemblyman Charles Calderon of Whittier - who introduced bills expanding the online tax collection rules. The bills were combined into a single measure that was passed as part of the 2011-2012 budget.

"Think before you click that mouse to buy anything from Amazon," Calderon said.

Backers of the referendum didn't respond directly to the boycott call, but restated their case that the new law is illegal and will hurt California's consumers, businesses and economy.

"This law would hurt consumers at a time they can't afford to send more tax dollars to Sacramento, and kill jobs when we need them for our economic recovery," the More Jobs Not Taxes campaign said in a statement. The group backing the referendum includes taxpayer groups, Internet companies and small businesses.

Federal law allows states to require out-of-state businesses to collect the existing state tax on sales if they have a physical presence in the state, such as a store. The new California law expands the definition of physical presence to include marketing affiliates and sister companies. Proponents say Amazon has related companies in California that fall under the new law.

Amazon cut off its contracts with affiliates in California after the change was signed into law and has not collected the tax from customers. The California Attorney General's office on July 18 gave backers approval to begin collecting the 505,000 signatures it would need to place a referendum on the ballot next year to reverse the law.

At least six states have approved laws targeting Amazon and other online retailers that don't collect sales tax, and more were weighing such measures this year.

Kelly Thomas Death Spurs 'Anonymous' Hackers To Action

Self-proclaimed "Anonymous" hackers have just released a video threatening the Fullerton Police department with a site-wide shutdown if certain demands aren't met. Called "Operation Fullerton," (#OpFullerton), the hackers are demanding that the officers involved in the beating of homeless man Kelly Thomas be prosecuted, that the Fullerton Police Chief resign, and that \$5 million be awarded to Thomas' family.

If these demands aren't met, the hackers threaten to bring down the

Fullerton Police Department's website and destroy all of its communication channels.

The newly published video is basically a recitation of this August 5th statement released by people who claim to be affiliated with the worldwide hacking network. While the letter lists the officers allegedly involved in the death of Thomas, The Huffington Post confirmed with police spokesperson Sgt. Andrew Goodrich that the Fullerton Police Department has not released these names. Goodrich maintains that any names that are "out there" come from dubious sources and are not confirmed.

Both the letter and the video compare the city of Fullerton to the Biblical cities Sodom and Gomorrah because of its "broken moral compass." "Anonymous" also calls the \$900,000 offered to Ron Thomas (Kelly's father) "hush" and "blood money."

Ron Thomas told the OC Weekly that he does not condone the cyber threats, saying "we re not going to do anything that s violent or illegal." Instead, he encourages his son's supporters to visit the Kelly Thomas Memorial Fund and keep on peacefully protesting at the Fullerton Police Department on Saturdays.

While the date of the threatened cyberattack has come and gone without incident, Fullerton Police are still on high alert.

From an official police statement:

There has been a cyber-threat made against the City of Fullerton s and the police department s electronic communication system. We believe this threat was received in relation to the death of Kelly Thomas in July. Our citizen s may be denied Internet communications with the city and police. However, city services including police and fire will continue to operate as usual.

We are in the midst of several independent investigations related to the Kelly Thomas incident, and if officers are found to be culpable, they will be held accountable. However, we have to wait for the investigations to be complete.

Kelly Thomas was a 37 year-old homeless man suffering from untreated schizophrenia living in Fullerton, California. On July 5, Fullerton police officers were responding to reports that a man was breaking into cars at a local bus depot. When police tried to search Thomas' backpack, he resisted and it took several minutes for officers to subdue him. Five days later, he died of the injuries he sustained during the altercation with the police. Fullerton police are still investigating the incident. Meanwhile, audio of the fight has surfaced, as well as video of eye witness accounts retelling what happened in vivid detail.

Yesterday, hackers claiming to be affiliated with "Anonymous" broke into the Bay Area Rapid Transit website and posted the private user information of more than 2,000, reports the Associated Press. The action targeted Bay Area Rapid Transit officials who blocked cellphone service last Thursday to prevent people from organizing a protest of a recent fatal shooting by police.

Glenn Manham, a U.K.-based hacker who tried (and failed) to break into Facebook earlier this year, finally got out of prison on Wednesday. It's unclear how long Manham spent in jail but since he was arrested on June 2, it sounds like two months. As a condition of his bail, British courts have forbidden Manham to access the Internet, and despite the fact that he botched his attempt to crack the world's most popular website, he's now the subject of a Scotland Yard investigation as well as one by the FBI.

Frankly, the ratio of things that Manham did not do to the amount of trouble he's in sends a strong message to the hacker community. The Guardian reports that Manham is accused of attempting to access Facebook a number of areas on Facebook servers, but failed on every count. "It is not known what data Mangham is accused of accessing," write Shane Dean and Josh Halliday. "The information commissioner's office, which investigates potential data breaches of this kind, said that Facebook had not reported any incident over this period." A Facebook spokesperson confirmed that "no user data was compromised."

So far, Manham has not been connected to the threat from Anonymous to "kill Facebook," but whomever is behind that threat might want to think twice. Once the FBI catches you hacking the consequences can be severe. Legendary hacker Kevin Mitnick just published his memoir about growing up hacking in the 1990s and his sort of hilarious escapades running from the FBI for three years. After they caught him in 1992, Mitnick was sentenced to five years in jail and afterward was forbidden to access the Internet for three years and to profit from telling his life story for seven years. It should be noted that Mitnick was actually very successful at hacking things, but he only did it out of "intellectual curiosity, pursuit of knowledge and seduction of adventure."

Apple Retail Stores Granted 'Special Attention' During UK Riots

While aggressive protestors were busy burning down various buildings and businesses across the UK, reports suggest Apple retail stores were granted 'special attention' by the Metropolitan Police.

The first report suggests that while a 20,000 square meter Sony warehouse was being burned down, the Police were treating the protection of an Apple Store at the Oxford Circus in London as a higher priority.

Various reports suggest that all major Apple retail stores were heavily guarded by the police - more so than any other retail store. The Apple Stores were also cleared of stock in an attempt to prevent looting. And with the police on guard protecting the stores and preventing damage, Apple had maximum defense.

It's common sense that Apple products are some of the most expensive on the market and would be one of the first to be stolen from a street full of retail outlets.

Although these defensive strategies were carried out, it doesn't mean that no damage was done at all, and only that the full extent of the damage cannot be determined at this time.

HP To End Mobile Products, May Sell PC Division

In a dramatic reshuffling, Hewlett-Packard Co. said Thursday that it will discontinue its tablet computer and smartphone products and may sell or spin off its PC division, bowing out of the consumer businesses.

It's one of the most extreme makeovers in the company's 72-year history and signals new CEO Leo Apotheker's most transparent move to date to make HP look more like longtime rival IBM Corp., which now makes most of its money from software and services.

The most apparent result for consumers will be the end of HP's TouchPad tablet, a sales dud, and HP-branded smartphones, also-rans in a booming market crowded with the iPhone and devices based on Google's Android system. By the end of next year, HP computers could be sold under another company's name.

HP will continue to sell servers and other equipment to business customers, just as IBM now does.

It was not immediately known whether any jobs will be cut. HP employs more than 300,000 worldwide.

A decade ago, HP emerged from a bitter fight to spend more than \$24 billion on Compaq Computer, setting the stage for HP to become the world's No. 1 maker of personal computers. Now, three CEOs later, HP is changing course - hard.

The PC division is HP's biggest revenue generator but least profitable division. The move has long been rumored, but just six months ago HP dismissed reports of the possibility as "irresponsible reporting" and that PCs are "core to HP's strategy for the connected world."

The PC industry is under pressure from hot-selling smartphones and tablet computers, which have contributed to already weak consumer demand for PCs in the U.S. and Europe.

More striking is that HP plans to shutter its fledgling smartphone and tablet business just two years after spending \$1.8 billion on smartphone maker Palm, which gave HP the webOS software that has been praised by critics but largely been ignored by the marketplace. It is here that HP was the victim of the Apple and Google juggernauts, as iPads and iPhones and smartphones running Google's Android software have been hot sellers, while HP devices have languished.

HP also announced it is buying Autonomy Corp., a business software maker, for about \$10 billion, ranking the deal among HP's biggest.

The decision to buy Autonomy also marks a change of course for HP, one that makes HP's trajectory look remarkably similar to rival IBM's nearly a decade ago. IBM, a key player in building the PC market in the 1980s, sold its PC business in 2004 to focus on software and services, which aren't as labor- or component-intensive as building computer hardware.

HP, which is based in Palo Alto, Calif., also announced its latest quarterly results an hour earlier than planned.

HP's net income increased in the fiscal third quarter, which ended July 31, but its lower-than-expected outlook for the current period weighed on the

stock.

The company earned 93 cents per share in the latest quarter. That's up from 75 cents per share a year earlier. Its adjusted earnings were \$1.10 per share, a penny above analyst expectations.

Revenue climbed less than 2 percent to \$31.2 billion, matching analysts' average expectations, according to FactSet.

For the current quarter, HP forecast adjusted earnings of \$1.12 to \$1.16 per share, below analysts' expectation of \$1.32 per share. Revenue should be \$32.1 billion to \$32.5 billion, short of analysts' estimate of \$34 billion.

The company plans to record a one-time charge of \$1 billion in the fourth quarter related to the webOS business shutdown and other restructuring costs. It said may also book a charge related to the value of the webOS business but did not say how much that would be.

HP also lowered its full-year revenue outlook. It now expects revenue of \$127.2 billion to \$127.6 billion, down from its previous estimate of \$129 billion to \$130 billion. Analysts were predicting \$129.1 billion in revenue.

Firefox 8 Kills Malicious Add-ons Installed Without User Permission

Even though the most up to date users are currently on version 5 of Firefox, Mozilla announced plans for a feature in Firefox 8 that will automatically block any add-ons have have been bundled into third-party software. Users will have to specifically approve each add-on through an in-browser alert that appears within Firefox. This security feature is a response to the vast quantity of self-installed toolbars and other nagging software additions that slow down browsing the Internet with Firefox. High profile examples of this type of tampering include Microsoft slipping a change to its .Net Framework Assistant into Firefox through Windows Update as well as Skype inserting a toolbar that continually crashed the browser.

After a user upgrades to Firefox 8, they will be prompted with a screen that details the third-party add-ons installed on the computer as well as the add-ons that the user specifically installed. All third-party add-ons will be deactivated and require user activity to turn them back on. This action is designed to help users that are unaware of invasive third-party add-ons and offer them a fresh start with the newly upgraded browser. Also, add-ons that aren't compatible with the new version of the browser will be turned off by default. According to the development schedule, Mozilla's Firefox 8 will hit the stable channel on September 27.

While Firefox fanatics will have to wait until the end of September to start using Firefox 8, Firefox 6 is nearing completion and scheduled to be released on August 16. Major changes include faster startup time, better management of permissions for individual websites, increased plugin support and a more friendly developer environment. When Firefox 7 rolls out weeks later, it's expected to use 20 percent less memory than previous versions as well as launch quicker, sync passwords and bookmarks between computers and render text clearer for users that rely on the zoom function.

Businesses in U.S. Complain of .xxx Shakedown

In preparation for a new triple-x Internet domain that will launch in December, lawyers for the most storied brands in the United States are scrambling to prevent an x-rated rip-off of an invaluable asset: corporate Web addresses.

The domain operator administering the .xxx domain is accepting early applications from brand owners who want control over their names. ICM Registry says it has received over 900,000 "expressions of interest" from companies that want to preregister their trademarks or block others from snapping them up to create, say, a Barbie.xxx or Coke.xxx.

While some adult-content providers are paying the approximately \$200 fee because they want to use the domain, other non-porn brands ranging from MTV Networks and Budget Travel to the Red Cross are preregistering to avoid future legal battles with cybersquatters who register trademarks with the intention of reselling them.

Porn and mainstream businesses alike complain they are being forced to buy domain names they don't want, don't need and won't use - and compare the process to a hold-up.

"Many feel they're being blackmailed to protect their brands," said Kristina Rosette, a trademark lawyer at the law firm Covington & Burling. She added that requiring preregistration fees to protect trademarks is not uncommon among domain registries, which then include the expected revenue in their business plans and projections.

ICM Registry, the private company that is introducing .xxx, was founded by Stuart Lawley, a British tech investor. He and his partners first proposed the .xxx domain in 2000 to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the international governing body that oversees top-level domains and reviews new applications. Yet because of fierce opposition from religious and conservative groups on moral grounds, and the Internet pornography industry, which feared censorship, it took ICM until this past March to win a final approval from ICANN's board and a 10-year contract to manage the .xxx domain.

Now that Lawley is finally in the home stretch and preparing to launch ICM in December, he dismisses charges that he is shaking down registrants. "We're doing it on a cost-recovery basis. We don't make a dime out of it," he said, adding that the fees would serve to cover the cost of verifying the applicant's identity and trademark ownership.

ICM is the latest company to stake out territory in the fast-growing registry landscape. The most established player in the field is Verisign, which operates both the .com and .net domains. Another outfit, Afiliast, owns .info and .mobi for sites designed for mobile devices. The number of registry companies is expected to explode next year, when ICANN will allow any company to apply for its own domain extension, like .apple or .facebook.

Most big companies own tens of thousands of domain names, according to Frederick Felman, the chief marketing officer of MarkMonitor which helps companies protect their brands online. Warner Brothers, for example, owns not only warnerbros.com but also batman.com, harrypotter.com and looneytunes.com among many others.

Each new domain brings a new round of cybersquatters, who register well-known trademarks to increase Web traffic or later sell them at an inflated price. Close behind are typosquatters, who register famous names with slight typographic errors, like Peppsi instead of Pepsi. The threat of rampant brand hijacking has alarmed companies who worry about the costs of defensive registrations with the launch of new domains.

A trademark owner that falls victim to cybersquatting or typosquatting must take legal action against the domain name holder, invoking ICANN's dispute resolution policy to wrestle back the address. The process can take months and several thousand dollars in legal fees.

When ICANN opens the gates to new domains starting in January 2012, the cost of brand protection is going to skyrocket. "Multiply .xxx times several hundred, and that's the scale of the problem," said Felman.

The businesses most affected by the launch of the .xxx domain are big name adult entertainment companies, such as Canadian-based Manwin and U.S.-based Hustler, which own dozens of domain names. They are not only refusing to pay, but also demanding that ICM block their domains free of charge.

Manwin, one of the world's largest online porn companies, owns domains including Brazzers.com, Xtube.com and YouPorn.com. In June, its lawyers sent a letter to Lawley, listing 57 of its pre-existing domain names and warning ICM to protect those names or risk the consequences.

Manwin "has placed ICM on notice that registration of its domain names without its consent will constitute a violation of Manwin's rights," the company said in a statement. Hustler, which owns domains including Hustlertv.com, Hustlerclothing.com and Hustlerstore.com, has sent a similar letter.

ICM responded to the legal threats with a seven-page report in July, claiming that a registry cannot be sued for trademark infringement. The letters, though, have placed ICM on notice, which increases the potential for liability if ICM sells the trademarked names, said Rosette.

Eighty percent of registrants so far have been from outside the pornography industry, according to Easyspace, a British registrar which has been taking preorders on behalf of businesses that want to protect their brands before the official registration period opens in September.

MTV Networks was among the early brands to sign up to protect names such as VH1 and Comedy Central. "This is a unique launch," said MTV spokesman Mark Jafar in an emailed statement. While the company will not operate a website at spongebob.xxx, it will "be preventing others from owning it," Jafar said, noting that MTV is registering more brands with .xxx than it normally would for a new domain.

Budget Travel cited similar concerns about a potential budgettravel.xxx. If people are Googling "budget travel" while planning a vacation, "We don't want them coming across something inappropriate," said Lisa Schneider, the digital general manager for the travel site Budget Travel.

Not all registrants have to pay the \$200 to \$300 fee. Under ICANN's rules, certain nonprofits including the Red Cross and the International Olympic Committee receive special protection in new domains because of their international status. At ICM's request, Red Cross has submitted a list of

its brand names, along with their Spanish and French translations, which will be blocked from .xxx free of charge, according to a Red Cross spokeswoman.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals also signed up. However, instead of blocking its name, said PETA spokeswoman Lindsay Rajt, the organization will launch peta.xxx as a pornography site that draws attention to the plight of animals.

Facebook: Paul Ceglia Doesn't Own Half The Company

Facebook attorneys late Monday revealed evidence that they say proves a New York man fabricated a contract that he says entitles him to part ownership of the \$50 billion social network.

Included in an after-hours court filing is an image of a two-page contract signed by Paul Ceglia of Wellsville, N.Y., and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg recovered by forensics experts from Ceglia's computer. The image is blurry and difficult to read but appears only to refer to a street-mapping database Ceglia hired Zuckerberg to work on in 2003 - and not Facebook.

Ceglia's lawsuit against Zuckerberg is based on a contract that he says shows that when he hired Zuckerberg for the streets project, he also invested \$1,000 in the then-Harvard University student's fledgling Facebook idea on the condition he'd own half if it expanded.

From the beginning, Facebook has said the contract submitted by Ceglia was doctored. Now, attorneys said, they've got the original, retrieved from embedded electronic data.

Facebook alluded to the find as "smoking gun" evidence in earlier court filings but was barred from publicly identifying it by a confidentiality order which has since been modified.

"This smoking gun evidence confirms what defendants have said all along: the purported contract attached to the complaint is an outright fabrication," attorney Orin Snyder of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP, wrote Monday.

Ceglia's attorney, Jeffrey Lake of San Diego, did not respond to an emailed request for comment from The Associated Press Monday night. Ceglia is in Ireland, according to emails he's written to his hometown newspaper, the Wellsville Daily Reporter.

In court papers filed last week, Ceglia's attorneys took issue with Facebook's claims that Ceglia had concealed certain documents.

"No good-faith basis has been shown for such an accusation," Lake wrote.

He said Ceglia had complied with the court's instructions to turn over all of his computers and electronic media as part of the discovery process in the case.

Zuckerberg's lawyers say six removable storage devices containing files entitled "Zuckerberg Contract" and "Facebook Files" are missing.

The lawyers are scheduled to appear before U.S. Magistrate Judge Leslie Foschio in Buffalo on Wednesday to argue a series of motions. Ceglia wants the judge to compel Facebook to turn over emails between Ceglia and Zuckerberg captured from Zuckerberg's Harvard account from 2003 and 2004. He's also asked that the case be sent to mediation for possible settlement to avoid protracted proceedings.

Facebook wants the judge to require Ceglia to produce the original electronic version of the contract and other electronic files and to allow further ink sampling from a hard-copy version of the contract.

Zuckerberg's attorneys oppose mediation as "pointless," saying the only resolution to the case they're willing to accept is to see it thrown out.

German Privacy Watchdog Dislikes Facebook's "Like"

The state of Schleswig-Holstein's data protection commissioner, Thilo Weichert, on Friday ordered state institutions to shut down the fan pages on the social networking site and remove the "Like" button from their websites, saying it leads to profiling that violates German and European law.

Facebook insisted Friday that it is in full compliance with European data protection laws.

On Friday, Weichert issued a statement saying technical analysis by his office shows Facebook violated German and European data protection laws by passing content data to the social network's servers in the U.S.

"Whoever visits facebook.com or uses a plug-in must expect that he or she will be tracked by the company for two years," Weichert said. "Facebook builds a broad individual and for members even a personalized profile."

A Facebook spokesman conceded that the company can see "information such as the IP address" of users who visit a site with a "Like" button.

"We delete this technical data within 90 days," said the spokesman, who did not give his name in keeping with company policy. "That is in keeping with normal industry standards."

Weichert's office ordered website owners in Schleswig-Holstein to "immediately stop the passing on of user data to Facebook in the USA by deactivating the respective services" and threatened to take legal action if they fail to comply.

He also urged Internet users in general to "keep their fingers from clicking on social plug-ins" and "not set up a Facebook account" to avoid being profiled.

The keepers of Germany's strict privacy laws have repeatedly clashed on issues of privacy with international Internet giants, such as Facebook and Google - often with success.

Last year Google allowed Germans who opposed its Street View mapping system to blur images of their homes, while Facebook in January granted members more control over their email address books, after a dispute over its "Friend Finder" service.

Germany's latest spat with the Palo Alto, California-based Facebook also comes a week after a leading member of Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative party in Schleswig-Holstein stepped down after admitting to having an affair with a 16-year-old he met over the social networking site.

Christian von Boetticher's resignation sparked a debate about the role of social media in politicians' lives, with German newspapers carrying reports from party members, angry that the state legislator spent more time posting personal information to Facebook than focusing on his job. He has since deleted his Facebook profile.

IBM Creates Brain-like Computer Chip

In science's storied quest to mimic how the human brain functions, IBM has hit a major milestone. In a joint venture being funded in part by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the computer manufacturer has created the first of what it calls "cognitive computer chips" which are designed to emulate the workings of a living brain.

The new technology - nicknamed SyNAPSE (Systems of Neuromorphic Adaptive Plastic Scalable Electronics) by DARPA - is miles ahead of any computer system before it, and works much differently. DARPA researcher Dharmendra Modha notes "The computers we have today are more like calculators. We want to make something like the brain." This includes functions like memory and learning, which are already present in the prototype chips built by IBM.

The next step in the ambitious project is to build a full computer system around these thinking chips, with the hopes that it will learn and adapt as it is introduced to new information and concepts. We know what you're thinking, and we're pretty sure this is how the Terminator movies started as well, but what IBM and its partners have done is still quite remarkable.

Woman Tweets Comment About Restaurant Employee, Gets Thrown Out

It isn't uncommon for Twitter users to tweet about their restaurant experiences - be they good or bad - but rarely does a casual social network comment get you booted from an establishment. That's just what happened to Allison Matsu when she visited a local restaurant bar in Houston called the Down House.

After hearing one of the bartenders make a harsh comment about a popular local bar owner, Matsu tweeted that the young man was a "twerp," mentioned the name of the restaurant, and tagged the tweet with a derogatory hashtag. Shortly thereafter, Down House manager Forrest DeSpain called the eatery and demanded that the phone be given to the young lady responsible for the tweet. Matsu claims that DeSpain then berated her with a lengthy slew of insults and insisted that she either publicly apologize for the comment or leave the Down House immediately.

Predictably, Matsu decided to take off, and once again took to Twitter to voice her frustration, noting that she was in tears after the decidedly one-sided conversation with the angry manager. Both Matsu and the Down House have received a bounty of comments since the incident, most of which

are staunchly on one side or the other. Does a social network comment warrant a refusal of service, or should we be muting our opinions for fear of repercussions? It's up to you to decide.

Sexting, Retweet and Woot Added to the Oxford English Dictionary

The list of ridiculous Internet speak that the Oxford English Dictionary has officially recognized as real words has expanded once again this week to include retweet, woot and sexting.

The words will appear in the upcoming edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary, which was first published 100 years ago. According to Angus Stevenson in the Oxford University Press blog, the 12th edition of the Concise Oxford English Dictionary will contain a total of about 400 new words, including cyberbullying, domestic goddess, gastric band, sexting, slow food, and textspeak.

The additions bring the dictionary's word count to more than 240,000 words. As Stevenson explains, the publishers of Oxford Dictionary have a long history of including slang and other unconventional words.

"The editors of the first edition, brothers Henry and Frank Fowler, stated that we admit colloquial, facetious, slang, and vulgar expressions with freedom, merely attaching a cautionary label," writes Stevenson. "Among the slang words they included were flapper, girl not yet out [in society], fizzle, do clumsily, bungle, make a mess of, mag, halfpenny, piffle, talk or act feebly, trifle, and potty, trivial, small."

"Sadly, the new edition has no room for tremendous words like brabble, paltry, noisy quarrel, and growlery, place to growl in, private room, den - what we might call a man cave these days. But the preoccupations of today's Generation Y have opened the door to some equally colourful vocabulary - how about momo, noob, nurdle, and woot?"

Retweet, woot and sexting were actually added to the Oxford Dictionaries Online all the way back in February. Their inclusion in the Concise Oxford English Dictionary will be the first time these terms appear in a printed tome.

The additions of retweet and sexting follow the adoption of a variety of other web-related terms to the Oxford-endorsed lexicon. Those terms include OMG, LOL, NSFW, Twittersphere, infographic, unfollow and newb.

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